

4. ISTANBUL ACTION PLAN (IsAP)

Introduction

The Istanbul Action Plan charts a course for developing countries to transform the digital divide into digital opportunities. Bridging the digital divide means providing access to telecommunications and information and communication technologies (ICTs) and promoting their use so that all segments of society can harness the opportunities of the information society. Digital opportunities not only serve as an engine for economic growth, they enable social, educational and medical progress. These goals hinge upon the rollout of ICT networks and services.

The Istanbul Action Plan is a comprehensive package that will enable developing countries to promote the equitable and sustainable deployment of affordable ICT networks and services.

The core of the Istanbul Action Plan is a series of six programmes to be implemented by the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) focusing on regulatory reform, new technologies, e-strategies and e-services/applications, economics and finance, human capacity building and special assistance to least developed countries.

The six programmes are as follows:

- 1) the Regulatory Reform programme focuses on practical tools and resources for regulatory bodies to engage in reform the most effectively to meet their national ICT development, access and use goals, creating safe investment opportunities and ensuring universal access to ICTs;
- 2) the Technologies and Telecommunication Network Development programme assists developing countries in the migration to new-generation technologies, including mobile, broadcasting, spectrum management, Internet protocol and multimedia to maximize utilization of appropriate new technologies in the development of ICT networks;
- 3) the e-strategies and e-services/applications programme fosters the implementation of value-added applications and Internet protocol (networks and applications) in government, health, education, business, agriculture and other sectors, extending the social and economic benefits of ICTs to all segments of society;
- 4) the Economics and Finance including Cost and Tariff programme assists developing countries to ready themselves in a competitive environment where the focus has shifted from state funding of infrastructure and services to private sector investment, developing guidelines on economic analysis, financing policies and strategies that encourage lower costs for end users;
- 5) the Human Capacity Building programme assists developing countries to strengthen their human, institutional and organizational capacity through human resource management and development, expanding its reach to include the very policy-makers and regulators that are at the cutting edge of designing and implementing policies to increase access and use of ICTs;
- 6) the Special Programme for the least developed countries (LDCs) will be valued for its quality and timely service aimed at integrating LDCs into the world economy through telecommunication development and its ability to positively impact the delivery of assistance to LDCs.

The work of the six programmes will be complemented and enhanced by initiatives that foster digital participation, targeting the ICT needs of special groups including women, youth and indigenous peoples, which take into consideration the impact of ICTs on these special groups.

The Action Plan encourages the accountability of both the programmes and the ITU-D study group activities. It also seeks to improve the working methods of the study groups, enabling them to deliver timely and relevant results.

The Plan also gives BDT the flexibility it needs to respond to requests for assistance by those countries that have undergone national emergencies.

Statistics and analysis explaining trends in ICT development are crucial for benchmarking countries, evaluating e-readiness and making informed national policy, legislation and regulation choices for ICT development. Statistics and analysis form the basis for objective and measurable indicators on the state of the global information economy and society. The Istanbul Action Plan will expand and enhance BDT's current information collection and dissemination activities to assist countries in evaluating their level of e-readiness.

The Istanbul Action Plan consists of four sections:

- 1) cooperation among the members, including world telecommunication development conferences (WTDCs), regional telecommunication development conferences (RTDCs), study groups and the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG);
- 2) the six Istanbul Action Plan programmes;
- 3) two cross-cutting activities to support the six programmes and study groups: statistics and information on ICTs, and partnerships and promotion, which are critical to sustainability of ICT development;
- 4) special initiatives: gender, youth, indigenous peoples, and the private sector.

The work of BDT in implementing this action plan will include three different types of actions: programmes, activities and initiatives. Programmes are actions that utilize expertise in specific domains. Activities are actions that provide cross-cutting support to the programmes, study groups and initiatives. Initiatives are targeted measures designed to address special needs identified as priorities by the membership. In addition, BDT will provide input to relevant ITU-D study groups.